

Internet studies

Past, present and future directions by Panayiota Tsatsou [book review]

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Panayiota Tsatsou, *Internet Studies: Past, Present and Future Directions*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2014; 279 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4094-4641-5, £73.99.

Panayiota Tsatsou's *Internet Studies: Past, Present and Future Directions* is an ambitious work that reviews two decades of research on the Internet. Tsatsou's goals were to provide an improved understanding of the nature of the Internet, explain how researchers have approached and studied the Internet over time, and consider how the Internet's structures and functions relate to its use in individual and social settings. The author aimed to provide a broad overview of the field of Internet studies and acknowledged that she could cover only a limited number of theories and real-life studies. Nonetheless, the number and choice of studies reviewed are impressive.

The book is divided into six chapters. In Chapter 1, Tsatsou introduces the book, presents definitions of the Internet, and describes the field of Internet studies as rapidly developing and interdisciplinary. In Chapter 2, she presents Internet histories. Chapters 3-5, discussed below, form the main part of the book. Within these chapters, the author synthesizes issues that researchers need to consider to help them contribute to a greater understanding of the Internet. Finally, Chapter 6 summarises the book and considers the Internet's future.

In Chapter 3, the author considers the value of theorising the Internet, discusses three major theoretical perspectives that researchers have used to study the Internet, and considers whether a theory of the Internet could be crafted in the future. The three theoretical perspectives considered are socio-centric versus techno-deterministic accounts of Internet development and use, the political economy of the Internet, and Castell's network society. In concluding this chapter, Tsatsou provides three questions that need addressing to craft an Internet theory. Firstly, does human agency, on the Internet and otherwise, emerge from social or structural factors? Secondly, who has power over the Internet and what are the implications of that power over the Internet's development and use? Thirdly, does the Internet have an identity, and if so, how does this identity affect user identity? Although the author cannot say whether it will be possible to create a unified theory of the Internet, she points out what needs to be done.

In Chapter 4, the author reviews real-life studies of the Internet that make use of theories discussed in the previous chapter. Tsatsou considers opportunities and risks in the four areas of citizen activism, virtual communities and identity, digital divides, and Internet governance.

In Chapter 5, Tsatsou reviews studies on the Internet as an object of research, on methods for researching the Internet, and on new areas of research that have arisen from the Internet. She also reviews studies on Internet research ethics.

In summary, the book provides a broad review of research that defines the Internet, describes its history, theorises the Internet, presents empirical studies on Internet use for select social purposes, and considers Internet research methods. The book is a valuable resource for anyone studying the Internet whether their goal is to develop or apply theory, conduct real-world studies, or select, critique or develop research methods. Many questions are raised to assist the next wave of researchers with their work.

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